CHAPTER XXV

INFLUENCING THE CROWD

Success in business, in the last analysis, turns upon touching the imagination of crowds. The reason that preachers in this present generation are less successful in getting people to want goodness than business men are in getting them to want motorcars, hats, and pianolas, is that business men as a class are more close and desperate students of human nature, and have boned down harder to the art of touching the imaginations of the crowds.—GERALD STANLEY LEE, *Crowds.*

In the early part of July, 1914, a collection of Frenchmen in Paris, or Germans in Berlin, was not a crowd in a psychological sense. Each individual had his own special interests and needs, and there was no powerful common idea to unify them. A group then represented only a collection of individuals. A month later, any collection of Frenchmen or Germans formed a crowd: Patriotism, hate, a common fear, a pervasive grief, had unified the individuals.

The psychology of the crowd is far different from the psychology of the personal members that compose it. The crowd is a distinct entity. Individuals restrain and subdue many of their impulses at the dictates of reason. The crowd never reasons. It only feels. As persons there is a sense of responsibility attached to our actions which checks many of our incitements, but the sense of responsibility is lost in the crowd because of its numbers. The crowd is exceedingly suggestible and will act upon the wildest and most extreme ideas. The crowd-mind is primitive and will cheer plans and perform actions which its members would utterly repudiate.

A mob is only a highly-wrought crowd. Ruskin's description is fitting: "You can talk a mob into anything; its feelings may be—usually are—on the whole, generous and right, but it has no foundation for them, no hold of them. You may tease or tickle it into anything at your pleasure. It thinks by infection, for the most part, catching an opinion like a cold, and there is

nothing so little that it will not roar itself wild about, when the fit is on, nothing so great but it will forget in an hour when the fit is past.[1]”

History will show us how the crowd-mind works. The medieval mind was not given to reasoning; the medieval man attached great weight to the utterance of authority; his religion touched chiefly the emotions. These conditions provided a rich soil for the propagation of the crowd-mind when, in the eleventh century, flagellation, a voluntary self-scourging, was preached by the monks. Substituting flagellation for reciting penetintial psalms was advocated by the reformers. A scale was drawn up, making one thousand strokes equivalent to ten psalms, or fifteen thousand to the entire psalter. This craze spread by leaps—and crowds. Flagellant fraternities sprang up. Priests carrying banners led through the streets great processions reciting prayers and whipping their bloody bodies with leathern thongs fitted with four iron points. Pope Clement denounced this practise and several of the leaders of these processions had to be burned at the stake before the frenzy could be uprooted.

All western and central Europe was turned into a crowd by the preaching of the crusaders, and millions of the followers of the Prince of Peace rushed to the Holy Land to kill the heathen. Even the children started on a crusade against the Saracens. The mob-spirit was so strong that home affections and persuasion could not prevail against it and thousands of mere babes died in their attempts to reach and redeem the Sacred Sepulchre.

In the early part of the eighteenth century the South Sea Company was formed in England. Britain became a speculative crowd. Stock in the South Sea Company rose from 128½ points in January to 550 in May, and scored 1,000 in July. Five million shares were sold at this premium. Speculation ran riot. Hundreds of companies were organized. One was formed “for a wheel of perpetual motion.” Another never troubled to give any reason at all for taking the cash of its subscribers—it merely announced that it was organized “for a design which will hereafter be promulgated.” Owners

began to sell, the mob caught the suggestion, a panic ensued, the South Sea Company stock fell 800 points in a few days, and more than a billion dollars evaporated in this era of frenzied speculation.

The burning of the witches at Salem, the Klondike gold craze, and the forty-eight people who were killed by mobs in the United States in 1913, are examples familiar to us in America.

The Crowd Must Have a Leader

The leader of the crowd or mob is its determining factor. He becomes self-hynoptized with the idea that unifies its members, his enthusiasm is contagious—and so is theirs. The crowd acts as he suggests. The great mass of people do not have any very sharply-drawn conclusions on any subject outside of their own little spheres, but when they become a crowd they are perfectly willing to accept ready-made, hand-me-down opinions. They will follow a leader at all costs—in labor troubles they often follow a leader in preference to obeying their government, in war they will throw self-preservation to the bushes and follow a leader in the face of guns that fire fourteen times a second. The mob becomes shorn of will-power and blindly obedient to its dictator. The Russian Government, recognizing the menace of the crowd-mind to its autocracy, formerly prohibited public gatherings. History is full of similar instances.

How the Crowd is Created

Today the crowd is as real a factor in our socialized life as are magnates and monopolies. It is too complex a problem merely to damn or praise it—it must be reckoned with, and mastered. The present problem is how to get the most and the best out of the crowd-spirit, and the public speaker finds this to be peculiarly his own question. His influence is multiplied if he can only

transmute his audience into a crowd. His affirmations must be their conclusions.

This can be accomplished by unifying the minds and needs of the audience and arousing their emotions. Their feelings, not their reason, must be played upon—*it is "up to" him to do this nobly.* Argument has its place on the platform, but even its potencies must subserve the speaker's plan of attack to *win possession* of his audience.

Reread the chapter on "Feeling and Enthusiasm." It is impossible to make an audience a crowd without appealing to their emotions. Can you imagine the average group becoming a crowd while hearing a lecture on Dry Fly Fishing, or on Egyptian Art? On the other hand, it would not have required world-famous eloquence to have turned any audience in Ulster, in 1914, into a crowd by discussing the Home Rule Act. The crowd-spirit depends largely on the subject used to fuse their individualities into one glowing whole.

Note how Antony played upon the feelings of his hearers in the famous funeral oration given by Shakespeare in "Julius Cæsar." From murmuring units the men became a unit—a mob.

ANTONY'S ORATION OVER CÆSAR'S BODY

Friends, Romans, countrymen! Lend me your ears;
I come to bury Cæsar, not to praise him.
The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones:
So let it be with Cæsar! The Noble Brutus
Hath told you Cæsar was ambitious.
If it were so, it was a grievous fault,
And grievously hath Cæsar answered it.
Here, under leave of Brutus, and the rest—
For Brutus is an honorable man,
So are they all, all honorable men—
Come I to speak in Cæsar's funeral.
He was my friend, faithful and just to me:

But Brutus says he was ambitious;
And Brutus is an honorable man.
He hath brought many captives home to Rome,
Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill:
Did this in Cæsar seem ambitious?
When that the poor have cried, Cæsar hath wept;
Ambition should be made of sterner stuff:
Yet Brutus says, he was ambitious;
And Brutus is an honorable man.
You all did see, that, on the Lupercal,
I thrice presented him a kingly crown,
Which he did thrice refuse. Was this ambition?
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;
And sure, he is an honorable man.
I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke,
But here I am to speak what I do know.
You all did love him once, not without cause;
What cause withholds you then to mourn for him?
Oh, judgment, thou art fled to brutish beasts,
And men have lost their reason!—Bear with me;
My heart is in the coffin there with Cæsar,
And I must pause till it come back to me. [*Weeps.*

1 *Plebeian.* Methinks there is much reason in his sayings.

2 *Ple.* If thou consider rightly of the matter,
Cæsar has had great wrong.

3 *Ple.* Has he, masters?
I fear there will a worse come in his place.

4 *Ple.* Mark'd ye his words? He would not take the crown;
Therefore, 'tis certain, he was not ambitious.

1 *Ple.* If it be found so, some will dear abide it.

2 *Ple.* Poor soul, his eyes are red as fire with weeping.

3 *Ple.* There's not a nobler man in Rome than Antony.

4 *Ple.* Now mark him, he begins again to speak.

Ant. But yesterday, the word of Cæsar might
Have stood against the world: now lies he there,
And none so poor to do him reverence.
Oh, masters! if I were dispos'd to stir
Your hearts and minds to mutiny and rage,
I should do Brutus wrong, and Cassius wrong,
Who, you all know, are honorable men.
I will not do them wrong; I rather choose

To wrong the dead, to wrong myself, and you,
Than I will wrong such honorable men.
But here's a parchment, with the seal of Cæsar;
I found it in his closet; 'tis his will:
Let but the commons hear this testament—
Which, pardon me, I do not mean to read—
And they would go and kiss dead Cæsar's wounds,
And dip their napkins in his sacred blood;
Yea, beg a hair of him for memory,
And, dying, mention it within their wills,
Bequeathing it as a rich legacy
Unto their issue.

4 *Ple.* We'll hear the will: Read it, Mark Antony.

All. The will! the will! we will hear Cæsar's will.

Ant. Have patience, gentle friends: I must not read it;
It is not meet you know how Cæsar lov'd you.
You are not wood, you are not stones, but men;
And, being men, hearing the will of Cæsar,
It will inflame you, it will make you mad:
'Tis good you know not that you are his heirs;
For if you should, oh, what would come of it!

4 *Ple.* Read the will; we'll hear it, Antony!
You shall read us the will! Cæsar's will!

Ant. Will you be patient? Will you stay awhile?
I have o'ershot myself, to tell you of it.
I fear I wrong the honorable men
Whose daggers have stab'd Cæsar; I do fear it.

4 *Ple.* They were traitors: Honorable men!

All. The will! the testament!

2 *Ple.* They were villains, murtherers! The will! Read the will!

Ant. You will compel me then to read the will?
Then, make a ring about the corpse of Cæsar,
And let me shew you him that made the will.
Shall I descend? And will you give me leave?

All. Come down.

2 *Ple.* Descend. [*He comes down from the Rostrum.*

3 *Ple.* You shall have leave.

4 *Ple.* A ring; stand round.

1 *Ple.* Stand from the hearse, stand from the body.

2 *Ple.* Room for Antony!—most noble Antony!

Ant. Nay, press not so upon me; stand far off.

All. Stand back! room! bear back!

Ant. If you have tears, prepare to shed them now;
You all do know this mantle: I remember
The first time ever Cæsar put it on;
'Twas on a summer's evening, in his tent,
That day he overcame the Nervii.
Look, in this place, ran Cassius' dagger through:
See, what a rent the envious Casca made:
Through this, the well-beloved Brutus stab'd;
And as he pluck'd his cursed steel away,
Mark how the blood of Cæsar follow'd it!—
As rushing out of doors, to be resolv'd
If Brutus so unkindly knock'd, or no;
For Brutus, as you know, was Cæsar's angel:
Judge, O you Gods, how Cæsar lov'd him!
This was the most unkindest cut of all!
For when the noble Cæsar saw him stab,
Ingratitude, more strong than traitors' arms,
Quite vanquish'd him: then burst his mighty heart;
And in his mantle muffling up his face,
Even at the base of Pompey's statue,
Which all the while ran blood, great Cæsar fell.
Oh what a fall was there, my countrymen!
Then I and you, and all of us, fell down,
Whilst bloody treason flourish'd over us.
Oh! now you weep; and I perceive you feel
The dint of pity; these are gracious drops.
Kind souls! what, weep you, when you but behold
Our Cæsar's vesture wounded? Look you here!
Here is himself, mar'd, as you see, by traitors.

1 *Ple.* Oh, piteous spectacle!

2 *Ple.* Oh, noble Cæsar!

3 *Ple.* Oh, woful day!

4 *Ple.* Oh, traitors, villains!

1 *Ple.* Oh, most bloody sight!

2 *Ple.* We will be reveng'd !

All. Revenge; about—seek—burn—fire—kill—slay!—Let not a traitor live!

Ant. Stay, countrymen.

1 *Ple.* Peace there! Hear the noble Antony.

2 *Ple.* We'll hear him, we'll follow him, we'll die with him.

Ant. Good friends, sweet friends, let me not stir you up

To such a sudden flood of mutiny;
They that have done this deed are honorable:
What private griefs they have, alas! I know not,
That made them do it; they are wise, and honorable,
And will, no doubt, with reasons answer you.
I come not, friends, to steal away your hearts;
I am no orator, as Brutus is;
But as you know me all, a plain blunt man,
That love my friend, and that they know full well
That gave me public leave to speak of him:
For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,
Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech,
To stir men's blood. I only speak right on:
I tell you that which you yourselves do know;
Show your sweet Cæsar's wounds, poor, poor, dumb mouths,
And bid them speak for me. But were I Brutus,
And Brutus Antony, there were an Antony
Would ruffle up your spirits, and put a tongue
In every wound of Cæsar, that should move
The stones of Rome to rise and mutiny.

All. We'll mutiny!

1 *Ple.* We'll burn the house of Brutus.

3 *Ple.* Away, then! Come, seek the conspirators.

Ant. Yet hear me, countrymen; yet hear me speak.

All. Peace, ho! Hear Antony, most noble Antony.

Ant. Why, friends, you go to do you know not what.
Wherein hath Cæsar thus deserv'd your loves?
Alas! you know not!—I must tell you then.
You have forgot the will I told you of.

Ple. Most true;—the will!—let's stay, and hear the will.

Ant. Here is the will, and under Cæsar's seal.
To every Roman citizen he gives,
To every several man, seventy-five drachmas.

2 *Ple.* Most noble Cæsar!—we'll revenge his death.

3 *Ple.* O royal Cæsar!

Ant. Hear me with patience.

All. Peace, ho!

Ant. Moreover, he hath left you all his walks,
His private arbours, and new-planted orchards,
On this side Tiber; he hath left them you,
And to your heirs forever, common pleasures,

To walk abroad, and recreate yourselves.
Here was a Cæsar! When comes such another?

1 *Ple.* Never, never!—Come, away, away!
We'll burn his body in the holy place,
And with the brands fire the traitors' houses.
Take up the body.

2 *Ple.* Go, fetch fire.

3 *Ple.* Pluck down benches.

4 *Ple.* Pluck down forms, windows, anything.

[*Exeunt Citizens, with the body.*

Ant. Now let it work. Mischief, thou art afoot,
Take thou what course thou wilt!

To unify single auditors into a crowd, express their common needs, aspirations, dangers, and emotions, deliver your message so that the interests of one shall appear to be the interests of all. The conviction of one man is intensified in proportion as he finds others sharing his belief—*and feeling.* Antony does not stop with telling the Roman populace that Cæsar fell—he makes the tragedy universal:

> Then I, and you, and all of us fell down,
> Whilst bloody treason flourished over us.

Applause, generally a sign of feeling, helps to unify an audience. The nature of the crowd is illustrated by the contagion of applause. Recently a throng in a New York moving-picture and vaudeville house had been applauding several songs, and when an advertisement for tailored skirts was thrown on the screen some one started the applause, and the crowd, like sheep, blindly imitated—until someone saw the joke and laughed; then the crowd again followed a leader and laughed at and applauded its own stupidity.

Actors sometimes start applause for their lines by snapping their fingers. Some one in the first few rows will mistake it for faint applause, and the whole theatre will chime in.

An observant auditor will be interested in noticing the various devices a monologist will use to get the first round of laughter and applause. He works so hard because he knows an audience of units is an audience of indifferent critics, but once get them to laughing together and each single laugher sweeps a number of others with him, until the whole theatre is aroar and the entertainer has scored. These are meretricious schemes, to be sure, and do not savor in the least of inspiration, but crowds have not changed in their nature in a thousand years and the one law holds for the greatest preacher and the pettiest stump-speaker—you must fuse your audience or they will not warm to your message. The devices of the great orator may not be so obvious as those of the vaudeville monologist, but the principle is the same: he tries to strike some universal note that will have all his hearers feeling alike at the same time.

The evangelist knows this when he has the soloist sing some touching song just before the address. Or he will have the entire congregation sing, and that is the psychology of "Now *every*body sing!" for he knows that they who will not join in the song are as yet outside the crowd. Many a time has the popular evangelist stopped in the middle of his talk, when he felt that his hearers were units instead of a molten mass (and a sensitive speaker can feel that condition most depressingly) and suddenly demanded that everyone arise and sing, or repeat aloud a familiar passage, or read in unison; or perhaps he has subtly left the thread of his discourse to tell a story that, from long experience, he knew would not fail to bring his hearers to a common feeling.

These things are important resources for the speaker, and happy is he who uses them worthily and not as a despicable charlatan. The difference between a demagogue and a leader is not so much a matter of method as of principle. Even the most dignified speaker must recognize the eternal laws of human nature. You are by no means urged to become a trickster on the platform—far from it!—but don't kill your speech with dignity. To be icily

correct is as silly as to rant. Do neither, but appeal to those world-old elements in your audience that have been recognized by all great speakers from Demosthenes to Sam Small, and see to it that you never debase your powers by arousing your hearers unworthily.

It is as hard to kindle enthusiasm in a scattered audience as to build a fire with scattered sticks. An audience to be converted into a crowd must be made to appear as a crowd. This cannot be done when they are widely scattered over a large seating space or when many empty benches separate the speaker from his hearers. Have your audience seated compactly. How many a preacher has bemoaned the enormous edifice over which what would normally be a large congregation has scattered in chilled and chilling solitude Sunday after Sunday! Bishop Brooks himself could not have inspired a congregation of one thousand souls seated in the vastness of St. Peter's at Rome. In that colossal sanctuary it is only on great occasions which bring out the multitudes that the service is before the high altar—at other times the smaller side-chapels are used.

Universal ideas surcharged with feeling help to create the crowd-atmosphere. Examples: liberty, character, righteousness, courage, fraternity, altruism, country, and national heroes. George Cohan was making psychology practical and profitable when he introduced the flag and flag-songs into his musical comedies. Cromwell's regiments prayed before the battle and went into the fight singing hymns. The French corps, singing the Marseillaise in 1914, charged the Germans as one man. Such unifying devices arouse the feelings, make soldiers fanatical mobs—and, alas, more efficient murderers.

[1] *Sesame and Lilies.*